The Pull Of You

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The Pull Of You

by orphan_account

Summary

They need each other. They need to escape. For Ford, it can’t work both ways.

For Stancest Week 2017, January 30th: Teen Stans.

11.

Ford is still crying in ugly, gulping sobs when they make it home. Stan walks him the whole way home, sniffling and holding his arm and pushing his own broken glasses up his nose again and again.

Dad is working the pawn shop, so they take the back door and sneak up the stairs. Stan holds his hand over Ford's mouth and nose to keep him quiet. Ford hates that he can't make it stop, like his heart has finally snapped and everything is pouring out of him, whether he likes it or not.

Ma sees them as soon as they step in, and jumps, but she's on the phone and can't do anything until that's wrapped up. They go to the bathroom together, and shut the door, and huddle close, Ford sitting on the toilet, Stan the tub. They're too old for this. They're eleven, now, and becoming proper men. No one should be able to beat them up, not with their boxing lessons, and they shouldn't ever cry.

Ford doesn't know what he would do without Stan. He's the only person in the world who shares the weight that presses constantly down on him.

Stan wipes his nose on his hand and bends closer, cupping Ford's face in his hands. "Hey," he says, "we made it to home base." Ford nods. "We escaped!"

Ford wipes his mouth; his hand comes away red. "We escaped," Ford echoes. The words are sweet on his tongue.

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13.

Stan finds the magazine who-knows-where. He has a knack for that, finding weird things in weird places. He's got an eye for value, if a forgiving one. Ford doesn't even ask, just gasps and claps a hand over his mouth. They grin at each other. "No way," Ford says.

"Yes way," Stan says.

It's late summer and burning hot in the Stan O' War's cabin, but it's their only secret place, and therefore the best place to discover secret things. Stan drops to his knees next to Ford, shoulder-to-shoulder, hip-to-hip, knee-to-knee, and slaps the magazine on their legs.

"No more artsy museum stuff for us," Stan says. "Or creepy anatomy books. This is the *real deal,* baby." He smacks the glossy cover.

"So open it," Ford says. Neither of them move in the humid air; they sit as still as the air as the ocean slugs the beach with tired waves. They both have an appreciation for dramatic pauses, and the tension it creates, the sweetness of anticipation not yet fulfilled.

Stan wipes his sweaty bangs off his forehead and flips it open.

“Whoa,” they both say. On one page, a woman crawls across a bed toward the camera, wearing a slinky black thing that has slid off one shoulder to reveal a pert breast and pink nipple. On the other, a woman sits on the edge of a chair, her legs spread wide, revealing delicate white panties under a schoolgirl skirt; her shirt is pulled open to show off her breasts.

Stan flips through it slowly, soaking in each picture. Their arms stick together from sweat; it drips down the backs of their necks. “Shit,” Stan says, finally.

“Yeah,” Ford says. He glances at Stan out of the corner of his eye. He wonders if Stan is as hot as he is – not just from the closed air, but under the collar, a tension building between his legs. He’s pretty much hard already, but it’s easy enough to hold his arm in a way that Stan won’t know if he just glances over.

When they reach the centerpiece, Stan lets out a whistle and peels it open, holding it up. Ford’s hard-on twitches against his pants, and he tenses. He glances at Stan again, who is flushed and grinning and focused on the girl. Ford glances between Stan’s legs. He can see the tent of Stan’s dick, just as hard as Ford; Ford quickly turns his head away. He wonders if they shouldn’t do this. “Man, what I wouldn’t give,” Stan says, a little dreamy.

Ford wipes sweat off his face and swallows. “Where’d you find it?”

“Huh?” Stan blinks at him, drawn out of his daydream. “Y’know, around.” He turns back to the magazine and lets it drop on their legs again; Ford twitches. Stan’s hand ends up grazing him as it pulls away from the magazine. Ford has to bite back his noise of surprise. Stan pauses, his hand not touching him, anymore, but sort of hovering in the air by Ford’s side. “Oh,” Stan says. “You too?”

There’s not much point to lying. There never is with Stan. He nods.

“Yeah, this is way better than I thought it’d be. Hey, should we…? Might as well, right?”

“I – don’t know, I…” He stops. Stan’s already thumbing his shorts open and tugging his underwear down. Ford shuts his eyes, but he’s already seen it, and his stomach twists. “It’s kinda weird, isn’t it?”

“Nah, it’s not weird. I mean, just *look* at them.” Ford opens his eyes. Stan taps the magazine, then, as an afterthought, traces his finger along the woman’s pussy. Ford makes a soft noise in his throat. After a moment, he follows suit, shakily taking himself out and wrapping a hand around himself. But now that he has, he can’t seem to focus on the women on the pages. He keeps focusing, in a hazy way, on the noises Stan is making, the soft skin-on-skin slap of his hand working himself, the way his breath is starting to hitch and go shallow. His body is still pressed against Ford’s.

It’s not so unfamiliar. They don’t have privacy, and Ford is a light sleeper, and Stan impatient. He’s heard this, before. He’s not sure that Stan knows. He’s not sure that it matters if he knows, because Stan is relaxed at his side, his shoulder heavy and warm against him. To Stan, this is just another thing to share.

Ford works himself, biting his lip. He finishes fast, before Stan, even, with a little shiver and gasp, sparks going up his spine. Stan lifts his head to watch, his palm flat on the most recent page. Then, Stan presses his forehead to Ford's shoulder, gives a soft little moan, and comes.

The smell of them is overwhelming in the heavy air. Neither of them move. The ocean splashes against the sand, steady and slow.

Ford shuts the magazine and rolls it up. "We can keep it here," he says. "So Dad won't find it."

It's what makes sense.

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15.

Ford lays on his back in Stanley's bed and listens to Dad rip Stan a new one. Stan's been suspended for fighting, and a week ago Dad caught him smoking, so it's a huge blow-up, on and on about how if Stan doesn't clean up his act, and *why can't you be like your brother,* and *get your head outta your ass or –*

Ford has their hardback copy of Moby Dick on his chest; he thumbs at the faded golden title, slowly. He wants to go out into the living room. He wants to defend Stan. After all, that's why Stan was suspended at all, always seems to be. He owes it to Stan. But the tumultuous rise and fall of his father's voice makes his heart skitter in his chest. It wouldn't help if he tried to interfere. He knows that. And Ma will step in, soon. Soon.

When her voice joins the fray, Ford relaxes, a little. *You're always getting on his case,* and *doesn't mean nothing,* and *you miserable hardass!*

The door to their room opens and Stan comes in. He shoots Ford a forced grin and jabs his thumb at the door. "Yeesh. What's up his keister?"

"That old crow, probably." Stan huffs out a fake laugh, *ha, ha,* though normally referencing Dad's taxidermy crow is surefire, an inside joke as old as they are. Ford scoots toward the wall; Stan doesn't need more than that to go over and drop down next to him, laying on his back and folding his hands over his stomach. Ford swallows. "It's just a few days," he says.

"Ehh, I don't care," Stan says. "Fucker had it coming. It was worth it to see him spit out that tooth."

"You really got him good," Ford says.

Their parents' door slams shut. A second later, the fridge door is thrown open with a loud clinking of glass, then slammed shut. Ma's voice starts to drift through the walls from the bedroom, bitching to Marla, her best girlfriend; Dad stomps around the kitchen. They don't have to see him to know he gets himself a drink and plops angrily into his armchair.

Stan pitches his voice high in Ford's favorite imitation of their mother. "Oy, Marla, you will not *believe* what that stick-in-the-ass shyster did today!"

“Oh, here we go,” Ford says, mimicking Marla’s thick Boston drawl. “Lay it on me, shug. Nah, I’m just cooking, I’m good to talk! Spill the beans!”

They go like that, back and forth, until Stan is snickering under his breath, the tension eased out of him. He turns toward Ford, draping an arm over his chest. Ford tenses, just for a moment. “Whatcha reading, anyway?”

Ford holds up the book. It’s one of Stan’s favorites, but Stan doesn’t need to know that he picked it specifically for him; he’s stuck a bookmark a fourth of the way through. “Wanna listen in?”

Stan nods and scoots closer, resting his face against Ford’s shoulder. Ford cracks open the book, clears his throat, and begins to read. Stan shifts, sliding his hand across Ford’s chest until it lays over his heart, where he can feel the words vibrate through his rib cage. They stay like that for a long, long time, the well-tread words soothing them with familiarity.

Then, slowly, Stan leans up, and over Ford. Ford stops. “Can I ask you something?” Stan asks.

Ford nods. Stan’s hand is still on his chest; he must be able to feel the way Ford’s heart has picked up speed, pattering fast.

“And you gotta be honest,” Stan says.

“I can lie to you?” Ford says. It’s supposed to be a joke, but Stan just narrows his eyes, so Ford nods. “I’ll be honest,” he says.

“Do you think…” Stan hesitates. “Do I drag you down?”

Ford laughs. The second he does, he feels terrible about it, but it seems to be the right answer – Stan’s face has softened. “No,” Ford says. He closes the book with one finger holding their place and sets his hand over Stan’s. “Not at all, Stanley.”

Stan bends down and kisses him.

It’s the first time they’ve kissed. By now, they’re familiar with each other’s bodies in a way that Ford doesn’t like to think about, but kissing – it’s always felt too intimate, like a broach of the unspoken contract they’re under. Don’t talk about it. Always, always make sure no one will catch them. Never act like they want it with any amount of desperation, because that implies craving, which implies forethought. Don’t kiss – kissing is what couples do, and they’re not a couple and don’t want anything but mutual relief from a familiar body.

Ford drops the book and kisses back. Stan opens his mouth against Ford’s, presses his slick tongue against Ford’s teeth. Ford lets him in.

“The door,” Ford whispers, suddenly. “Did you lock the door?”

“No.” Stan nips Ford’s jaw, then climbs out of bed and locks their door. He turns, and they stare at each other; Ford wonders if he looks the way Stan does, flushed and needy and a little scared. Stan chases it away with a grin and clambers back into bed to straddle Ford.

It's familiar, from there – Stan doesn't go to kiss him again, though Ford's lips ache for it and he's certain Stan's do, too. He works Ford's pants open, and his own, and presses the soft skin together, holding them in his hand. He rolls his hips in quick, sure thrusts. It isn't enough. It's familiar. Ford wants more of Stan, wants his wet mouth, wants to feel Stan inside of him, or to be inside of Stan, to have that intrusion that can't be taken back, once it's done. He thinks that if he reaches deep enough in Stan, he could pull out the thorns there, which bury deeper with each passing year, each shouting match. He knows that if Stan could, he would do the same to Ford, pluck the shame out of him, and smallness, leaving only his brilliance.

Ford pulls him down, and kisses him deeply, and almost disappears.

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17.

Ford sits on top of the Stan O'War, gazing out at the sea. Stan putters around on the beach, kicking up sand, looking for their hammer, which he lobbed in a fit of anger because of a 'stupid god damn nail.' Ford's focus is on the distant horizon, where puffy clouds build sedately.

"Oh, hey, Sixer," Stan calls, suddenly. "I'm gonna be out tonight. Got another date with Carla."

Ford turns his head to study him. "Alright," he says, after a moment.

"Yeah," Stan says. He crouches down with a grunt. "I guess we're getting pretty serious." He pulls the hammer out of the sand and gives it a little shake.

It's good, Ford thinks. He really does believe it, almost wholly. They're getting too old, now, to do what they've been doing. They need to stop. The more time they spend apart, the more Ford becomes aware of how suffocating it can be to have Stan as close as he is – to always have someone who knows every secret, to not have a private room in his heart, to always have to plan for the future with Stan towing after him.

More than that – wherever Stan goes, their past follows, too. And isn't that the point of their games, of this ship, of all of it? To escape? To find a world out there where they belong? Ford looks at his hand where it rests on the ship. "That's good," he says.

Stan is watching him, crouching still. "Yeah." He straightens up with a crack from his back and a loud grunt. He lopes over and climbs up the ship to sit next to Ford. "I keep tellin' her to not get too attached," he says. "That as soon as we graduate, we're outta here." He leans over the cabin and drops the hammer next to the toolbox; it clatters noisily, probably scraping the wood. "Women, am I right?"

Ford makes a noncommittal noise. Stan is sitting too close. Two days ago, he and Dad got into it again; sometimes Ford thinks it stays with him longer than Stan, because Stan always starts laughing right after, shakes it off. He thinks of the way Stan rolled his eyes and slapped his feet on the table when Dad started on him. He thinks of Stan smoking out on the fire

escape, the smoke curling away from his mouth, the taste of it when he'd leaned into Ford. (''What about McCorkle?" Ford had asked. Stan never has a satisfactory answer to that.)

"I have an idea for my science fair project," Ford says.

"What, already? Jeez, nerd, it's not for another two months. We all know you're gonna win it."

Ford lets it roll off his back. "Do you know what a perpetual motion machine is?"

Stan laughs. "I got one," he says, and pats Ford's thigh.

"It's something that never stops," Ford says. "Something that defies the very laws of physics." He swallows. "I think I can make one."

"Yeah?"

"It's just an idea, right now," he says. "Of course." Stan leans against him and takes a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. He taps one out and passes it over to Ford. "At this point, it's just a pipe dream." Stan pulls the lighter out; Ford bends down to let him light it. "But I think I can do it. If I did…" He takes a deep, slow drag, and passes the cigarette to Stan. "It would change the world, Stanley. It would make history."

"Oh," Stan says. He puffs at the cigarette and blows out a smoke ring. "That's my Sixer," he says, and scrubs his hand through Ford's hair.

He doesn't understand. No, it's not even that – he won't *let* himself understand. Ford suddenly wants to prise himself away from Stan's side. (He wants to turn toward him, and straddle his thighs, and bury into him.) Stan passes the cigarette over; Ford takes it, and pulls at it, and sighs. "So," he says. "Are you going to see a movie?"

"Mm. Yeah. She's addicted to horror flicks, man."

Good, Ford thinks. This is good. He shuts his eyes, and listens to the sea, and thinks of what it might be like to spread his wings and take off, alone, into the sky, to shed the weight of this beach, of their cluttered room and rickety fire escape, of every familiar corner store he's seen a hundred thousand times. It makes something tremble in him.

Stan can be happy anywhere, Ford thinks. He has that luxury.

Ford believes it, almost wholly.

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